

## Peddlers and Post Traders: the Army Sutler on the Frontier

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knowledgeable referees, who at least could have saved it from being marred by inaccuracies.

This book should be used with great caution. Those who read it as their first book on the Dakota War would be well advised also to study such accurate and objective histories as Carley and volume two of William Watts Folwell's *A History of Minnesota* (1924; reprinted by the Minnesota Historical Society, 1961).

*Peddlers and Post Traders: The Army Sutler on the Frontier*, by David Michael Delo. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992. 274 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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The significant story of civilian sutlers and post traders, who enjoyed a special privilege to sell a variety of commodities (including food and liquor) to soldiers in the U.S. Army, has received little attention. Francis Lord's *Civil War Sutlers and Their Wares* has been the most comprehensive look at the topic, but that for only a limited period. Montana historian David Delo provides the first overview of the unique institution which had its beginnings among camp followers in Europe, came to America from Britain, and flourished on the American frontier. Delo traces the legal standing of sutlers, assesses their importance to the frontier army, relates the story of the army subsistence department, and details the constant problems raised by the sale of liquor to the troops by sutlers. The prohibition of the sale of hard liquor to the soldiers in 1881 and the reforms fostered by patronage abuses combined to destroy the institution of post traders. When the frontier closed, post traders were replaced by the army post exchange.

A few enterprising merchants, known as sutlers before and during the Civil War and post traders afterward, were often considered a "necessary evil" by military leaders and government officials. Despite the restrictions placed on them by licenses, price controls, location, business hours, and uncollected accounts, there were opportunities for these monopolistic businesses to make money, especially through the sale of alcoholic beverages. A few individuals became wealthy. Case studies of these successful entrepreneurs reveal that they were astute managers who also engaged in other activities, including trading with Indians, lumbering, mining, banking, contracting with the army to supply forage and beef, ranching, freighting, and speculating in real estate. Among these were James Kennerly at Fort Atkinson, Nebraska; Hiero T. Wilson at Fort

Gibson, Indian Territory, and Fort Scott, Kansas; Franklin Steele at Fort Snelling, Minnesota; John Dougherty at Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and Fort Laramie, Wyoming; Hiram Rich at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and James K. Moore at Camp Brown, Wyoming. The nature of monopoly contributed to abuses, corruption, political appointments, and scandals. During U. S. Grant's administration, Secretary of War William Belknap (of Keokuk, Iowa) was indicted for dishonest appointments, and two retired generals were involved (including J. M. Hedrick of Ottumwa, Iowa). Subsequent reforms led to the abolition of post traderships.

Delo provides a sound overview but missed an opportunity to include some important cases. William H. Moore, sutler at Fort Union, New Mexico, before, during, and after the Civil War not only made a fortune and lost it (due, in part, to political appointments, including President Grant's brother-in-law, John Dent, as post trader), but he virtually financed the Union cause in New Mexico Territory during the critical Confederate invasion in 1861-1862. Dent also requires further investigation as part of the corruption. There were sutlers at all Iowa forts who deserve examination.

There are minor errors that should not have slipped by an astute editor. Cantonment Martin (37) was not sixteen miles north of Omaha (that was Cantonment Council Bluffs, which became Fort Atkinson) but was on an island in the Missouri River between present Leavenworth and Atchison, Kansas. Council Grove (42) was not in Missouri but Kansas. David Meriwether (42) was not the first governor of New Mexico Territory; he was the third. Jefferson Barracks, Missouri (60), was not abandoned in 1837. Theodore Weichselbaum's brewery (187) was in Ogden, Kansas, not Utah. The Kansas State Historical Society is not located in Lawrence but Topeka. Two relevant books are not listed in the bibliography: Duane M. Greene's *American Aristocracy* (1880) and Darlis Miller's *Soldiers and Settlers* (1989). Despite these complaints, this is the best book available on the subject.

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